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Senate passes graduation-requirement plan

LANSING — The Senate today approved legislation that puts Michigan at the forefront of efforts to create rigorous statewide high-school graduation requirements so young people leave school ready for the 21st century.

“We are preparing students for the future and putting our schools on the same educational scale as other schools around the country,” said Sen. Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac. “At the same time, I know many parents and educators expressed opinions on the foreign language and vocational aspects during the hearing in my district. I feel those concerns have been addressed and am pleased to see the requirements move forward.”

The legislation would require students to take four years, or equivalent credit, of English and math; three of science and social studies; and one year of an arts course as well as a health and physical-education course. Additionally, students would have to take biology, geometry and Algebra I and II, among other specific course requirements.

In one key difference from the House plan, senators backed a two-year foreign-language requirement that could be fulfilled anytime between kindergarten and graduation.

The Senate Education Committee logged almost 3,000 miles in travel to nine hearings across the state that included members of the committee and local lawmakers. Port Huron hosted a hearing on March 3.

Throughout the hearing process, lawmakers listened to more than 24 hours of testimony from more than 200 people.

After the state superintendent and State Board of Education proposed graduation requirements beyond the half year of civics class now required, state lawmakers immediately began giving the board’s proposal careful consideration.

Lawmakers now will begin working out the differences between the Senate and House versions.

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